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Communities and Neighborhoods in Land Use Planning

LAND USE planning is built squarely upon democracy. Fundamental to its effectiveness is the full representation of all farmer views and attitudes in each community in the plans and conclusions of county planning committees.

Because this is true, it is necessary for each community and county planning committee to be actively concerned with the ways in which it can strengthen and invigorate democracy in planning. Representative planning is not something that can be had simply by wishing for it. Special care must be taken to make sure that the plans and conclusions reached by planning committees are arrived at democratically and that they have the support of the farm people who live in the area served by the committee.

Democracy in planning begins with the formation of planning committees. Many of the factors involved in the democratic representation of farm people's opinions and attitudes in land use planning have been discussed in County Planning Series No. 2, Membership of Land Use Planning Committees. That leaflet outlines the various types of membership that should be included on land use planning committees. The present leaflet suggests some additional devices for obtaining more adequate farmer representation and participation on community and county committees.

Outlining Community Boundaries.

This method calls for the outlining of the boundaries of each community within the county and also the outlining

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of the smaller neighborhoods that make up each community. There is no hard-and-fast rule about which of these jobs should be done first. It is highly desirable that both be done as early as possible, however, in order that the community and county planning committees may be more effective representatives of the people they serve.

In counties where planning is just being organized, the boundaries of each community should be outlined right at the beginning, perhaps in the first two or three meetings preliminary to setting up an actual planning organization. Outlining the community boundaries will show exactly the number of community committees the county should have. It will help to find the points in each community where committee meetings can be held most conveniently for the farmers. This will assist in making sure that each community committee actually represents the entire community it is supposed to serve. Many planning committees that are already organized may also find that their communities need to be reoutlined and their membership shifted. If needed, such reorganization often contributes materially to the active interest and cooperation of the farmers in the various communities.

Community Composed of Smaller Neighborhoods.

Broadly speaking, a community may be defined as an area composed of a number of smaller neighborhoods within which all the people have strong common interests and are more or less accustomed to working and associating with each other in churches, schools, and social activities. The community generally possesses one center to which most of its people travel fairly often. Usually the people in the community are accustomed to attending meetings of various kinds at the community center, and much of their working together on a community basis revolves around this central point.

A neighborhood, as the term is used in planning, consists of a small group of farm families whose houses are fairly close together. Ordinarily there are from 20 to 30 families in each neighborhood. Their houses frequently are centered around an open-country store, country school, or a church.

Working relationships in the neighborhood are likely to be on a direct personal basis in which day-by-day contact is possible.

Land use planning calls for the cooperative work of farm people within each neighborhood, community, and county. People who live in the same natural community have the same interests, know each other pretty well, and work together more effectively than can groups that are made up of individuals from several communities or parts of communities. This natural ability of people to work together in community groups should be encouraged as an aid to land use planning.

Community Provides Basis For Cooperation.

The community provides a unit within which the people in all its neighborhoods are accustomed to working together in various activities and interests. The neighborhoods that fall into a common group like this provide the best working combination of neighborhoods upon which farmer representation, participation, and cooperation in planning can be based.

Political units such as beats, precincts, and townships are artificially determined and seldom are true communities. A community may include several townships, or there may be more than one community in a township, depending upon circumstances. The natural community lines often extend from one township into another and may sometimes reach out into adjacent counties.

Usually the number of communities in a county will range from 7 to 14. **In some counties, particularly in the West, there may be fewer than 7 communities, but very seldom, if ever, will any county have more than 14.** The number of communities oftenest found by scientific study ranges from 9 to 12 per county. This fact is significant to land use planning, since planning is based largely upon the work of community committees.

Better Representation Made Possible.

In the initial stages of planning, it is very easy for a county planning committee to set up 20 or even more com-

munity committees, only to discover later that fewer committees, representing communities more carefully delineated, actually can provide a more representative organization for the county. The importance of careful delineation of community boundaries is evident from a recent study made of county planning organization in one county. This analysis showed that about half of the farming people in the county had no representation in the planning organization, although some 26 "community committees" were at work. Careful reconsideration showed that there were only 9 natural communities in the county, and that 9 community committees could provide representation to all the people in every part of the county. This was something that 26 committees had previously been unable to do.

Community boundaries probably should be outlined directly upon a map that shows the principal roads, towns and villages, schools, churches, and recreation centers. It is not a difficult job and can be performed, at least roughly, during the course of one or two county meetings. But it is a task that requires sober thought and care because the real boundaries of communities are not often apparent to the casual glance.

Technical help in mapping communities is available to any county planning committee that requests this assistance. On request, a trained worker can be sent to the county to confer with the county committee and, if necessary, assist the committee in mapping a sample community and its neighborhoods. Experience to date shows that, once a committee has participated with a trained worker in doing a sample job, it can go ahead and map the other communities and neighborhoods of the county without further help. For preliminary working purposes, however, the county committee will often be able to perform this task without technical help, particularly when it can obtain the guidance of persons who have taken part in mapping other communities.

Participation of Neighborhoods Important.

A community usually includes from 5 to 15 or more neighborhood groups. Since the democratic representation

of farm people is the end aimed at in the community committee's set-up, the location of these smaller neighborhoods should be known. Each of the smaller neighborhoods should have at least one representative on the community planning committee.

Any community organization for planning purposes that fails to have its membership drawn from each of the neighborhoods within the community fails in some part to provide the representative basis necessary in democratic planning. On the other hand, by having each neighborhood group represented in the committee membership, all significant groups in the community are brought into direct contact with, and are made part of, the community's land use planning work.

This does more than enable the views and opinions of each group in the community to be made known fully in deliberations of the community planning committee. In addition, it establishes a way for information and opinion to circulate back and forth between the people in each neighborhood and their representatives on the committee. The results of committee discussions thus may be carried back to the people most directly concerned. Furthermore, it provides an organized way for the people in each neighborhood to obtain any necessary reconsideration of plans which may have been agreed upon in committee meetings but which a particular neighborhood may not understand or approve. Through this means also a workable basis is created for holding community-wide meetings where plans may be talked over with all the people.

Neighborhoods Should Be Mapped.

To assure adequate representation of the various neighborhoods within each community, it is necessary to do a job of mapping similar to that done for the community. Each of the smaller neighborhoods which make up each community should be outlined within the boundaries that have been determined for the community. By this means it can be known how many neighborhood representatives should be members of the community planning committee, and the committee itself can make sure that no neighborhood is being neglected.

It also makes it possible to determine whether any neighborhood is being given more than its proportionate share of representation.

How to Bound Communities.

The first step in identifying communities is to locate on the map all of the larger "centers" in the county for the various interests and activities of farm people. These may be schools, churches, recreation sites, places for social activities, and trade. Usually a community center offers a combination of these. Often the larger rural community will have a village as its center.

The next step is to determine the area surrounding the center within which the people tend naturally to meet together and where all the people have a common feeling of belonging to the area that bears the name of the center. This area can be mapped.

In doing so the committee should find and mark on a map the most distant point from the center on each road, at which the committee can say, "From here into the village, or center, the majority of the people are identified with this center, go to it frequently, participate in common activities, and would go there if a community meeting were called."

By drawing a line around each center to touch the points thus made on a map, the community boundaries may be established on a tentative basis. The accuracy of the boundaries should then be checked with the farmers living near the boundary lines, to discover whether they consider themselves a part of the community area that has been mapped. This check with the farmers makes it possible to be reasonably sure that the people living within the bounded area are part of a single community. Still greater exactness in determining community boundaries is possible, of course, if that is necessary.

How to Bound Neighborhoods.

In bounding neighborhoods the procedure is similar to that for outlining communities. First, all the churches, schools, and trade centers within the community are located on a map. Consideration may then be given to the imme-

diates area surrounding each of these centers to discover the area within which people know each other intimately, look upon each other as neighbors, and consider themselves as being a part of the immediate neighborhood. Occasionally, areas are found where neighborhood ties either have never existed or are no longer present, but even there areas can be outlined in which people would have more in common than if they were grouped in any other way.

When the boundaries of communities and smaller neighborhoods are mapped carefully and when committee members are chosen from the areas outlined, a much more representative planning organization is possible within the county than would be the case through hit-or-miss organization. Each smaller neighborhood can then be represented by membership on its community planning committee. Each community can have its own committee to represent it and can send real representatives to participate in meetings of the county planning committee. In this way the farm people in every part of the county can have a better opportunity to make their views and ideas felt in sessions of the community and county planning committee.

The outlining of these boundaries makes a basic contribution to the democratic development of county land use plans.

Previous publications in this County Planning Series:

- No. 1—County Land Use Planning.
- No. 2—Membership of Land Use Planning Committees.
- No. 3—The Land Use Planning Organization.
- No. 4—The Scope of Land Use Planning.
- No. 5—Pooling Ideas in Land Use Planning.

